

THE MILITARY PROFESSION

SEMINAR IX

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by

Vice Admiral Stansfield Turner, USN

President, Naval War College

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VICE ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER

Here we are at the beginning of the ninth week, your last Seminar week in Strategy. It's a peculiarly-designed week; designed both to have a relationship to the eight weeks that have gone before, and to the whole Management Curriculum that's about to come.

So I'd like to start this morning by philosophizing on how you've come to be where you are, a different process than your predecessors here, largely having reached here through the use of historical case studies. Why? Why have we tried this approach for the past eight Seminar weeks, and for the windup week that you're now starting?

Well, Bismarck, as you recall, said, "Fools say they learn from experience. I prefer to profit from other people's experience."

Beyond this very practical approach to the use of historical experience, you and I can appreciate that much of military knowledge simply can not be learned by experience in advance of actual conflict. I think you and I can also particularly appreciate that it is dangerous to lean too heavily on our individual military experience. It generally is too narrow. And I think it's becoming more so as we become more technical, more specialized. We simply must draw upon the experience of others, and history is one good way to do that.

Now at the same time, let's not forget Phil Crowl's wise words of admonition in his opening talk. We can draw parallels and analogies between history and today only with peril. History never will repeat itself exactly. It never can. But the study of yesterday can show us how some decisions were made poorly, and how some were made well. But more important, the very process of dissecting yesterday, and what is applicable in it to today, forces us to dissect today and learn what forces are really at work around us. Herein lies the main value of our historical approach.

It is in the development of the mental attitudes for tackling a problem. It is this habit of dissection. It is the desire to search for what is true. It is the recognition of the need for objectivity. It's the patience and the willingness to probe and probe until you believe you have found all of the relevant factors concerning the problem that you're interested in.

Hopefully, it is also appreciating that the issues of Strategy are far from black and white, right and wrong. Surely, you must leave this portion of your course, more skeptical of clichés and standard solutions than when you arrived.

And you've also come here through history to develop the sense of the thrill, the intellectual satisfaction in probing into the complex issues of Strategy. Surely you will not leave this portion of the Course unless you are more challenged not to stop digging until you have plumbed to the bottom of the problem.

You've come here through history also, because you are members of a profession--not a craft or a trade. Doctors and Lawyers must understand the history of the processes and the skills that they are executing. Any profession has a history. A Mason or a Plumber--he needs only understand the specific skills that he must use this afternoon.

You've come here through history also, because your profession is so intimately involved with human beings. You must have a better understanding of human attitudes, behavior and motivation than most other professionals. Being technically competent is very important in your life and mine, but it is not enough if you're going to rise to the top of your profession.

And what better way at this stage in your educational experience, at this stage in your career, to inject some liberal education into your experience, than by delving into history? Beyond this, I sincerely hope that this excursion into history has helped you to better appreciate how intellectually demanding and stimulating is your career as a military officer or a government civilian.

I have attempted to make this course in Strategy a difficult academic exercise. I don't suppose you agree with that. But I haven't done that just because I do admire academicians. I have great admiration for the men of the academic world. But I also recognize that they deal only in problems that pale in simplicity compared with ours. Look at these fine civilian professors who have been teaching you. It's only natural that

you and I expect them to know more of history than we. But are they more conversant with the terms of our trade than we are? With Balance of Power, Coalition Warfare, Limited War, Total War, Deterrence, Civilian Control, and so on? If so, where have we been? Your civilian professors are not as close to being professional strategists as any of you in uniform. If you feel at a disadvantage in talking Strategy with them, don't excuse it because you are an operator and not an academic. You are well up in your profession. You are pointed higher, or you wouldn't be here. Strategy is the framework of everything that you do. Strategy is a highly demanding intellectual exercise. Your profession is highly intellectual.

One of the greatest dangers today, in my opinion, is the abdication of intellectual leadership to people from the academic world. Their experience, in no way, equips them to comprehend the complexity and the number of incommensurables involved in military decision making.

So you have been here through history also, to appreciate that point firsthand, to recognize the grandeur and challenge of your profession. In the past eight weeks you can have done no more than to appreciate that this challenge exists. We have not covered Strategy. We have not even touched on many of the major issues of Strategy. You have not had time for many of the debates that must be debated before you mature as strategists. Don't be disappointed, though, if you're not ready to take away from here with you a bagful of immutable axioms of strategy.

I personally do not believe that there are set rules, principles or definitions of warfare or Strategy. At least, if there are, in my view they are more misused and misunderstood than they are helpful today.

I look on strategy as a picture puzzle that you're piecing together. And in strategy that puzzle will always have some missing pieces. Yours and mine may have more missing pieces than necessary, because we haven't worked hard enough to find them. But I would suggest that even Henry Kissinger is missing some of the pieces in his puzzle.

If all this sounds discouragingly to you like there's more work ahead, I should add that I am most excited about the progress that you have made in these past eight or eleven weeks. You have excited all of your professors. You have excited all of the visiting lecturers who have been here. And you've achieved this because you have probed for the Strategic concepts that are buried in these cases. I can only believe that you have begun to enjoy the intellectual jousting that goes with all this. I'm very grateful to you. You've borne out my confidence in you, my confidence that you could and would respond in this way. Though a lot of people said I was taking a gamble, I knew that I wasn't, because I felt that I knew you. And I would add also, that your success has given me greater hope and expectation than I have had for some time in the kind of Armed Forces that can and will evolve in this country, when you rise to the positions of leadership at the top.

Let me go back to my analogy of the picture puzzle, though. We could have offered you a more complete picture, by giving you a course in the history of Strategic Concepts, from Sun Tzu, to Mahan, to Douhet, to McKinder, to Mao, and so on. If we had, your knowledge of Strategy would not have been any deeper today. You can only cover so much in eight weeks. But superficially it might be more complete and coherent. But what would concern me is that you might leave here feeling that you had an adequate grasp, a full picture puzzle of Strategy. And that, in my view, would be a catastrophe. You will only become a Strategist if you continually probe the past as part of your examination of the ever-changing present.

Now this, the ninth week, is the week in which we as the Professional Military Men, enter the scene directly. This week looks at us as one of the elements of strategy. It is an examination of what motivates us, as military men, of what should motivate us, and of how we make those two coincide in the real world.

Two of our books are not strictly history, as you know. They're novels. Why? Why novels? Because, as I said earlier, war is a very human affair. Novels can often treat such human elements better than anything else. And you and I had best not lose sight of that human element of Strategy in warfare.

In one of these books, a soldier's bandage, which has some blood showing through, should have been a badge of disgrace. Instead it becomes a symbol, a "Red Badge of Courage." Why?

Because men react to symbols and often fail to ask what are the facts behind them. But in this case, that simple badge or symbol turns a coward into a maniac of courage and heroism. It shapes him into a man who willingly is seduced by still another symbol, the battle colors of his regiment, into wantonly risking his life for a few hundred yards of useless pasture land.

Now in its starkest colors, a large part of the genius of military leadership has always been to motivate men to work and to sacrifice for goals that they never understood, and which in many cases are incomprehensible. I'm not talking only of heroics as in the Red Badge of Courage; I'm talking about many of the essential tasks that you and I have performed in the course of our careers--things like motivating a Mess Cook, or for you Army types, KP; or a bilge cleaner, to think that what he is doing has an important and vital purpose. Many times that purpose is simply the self-aggrandizement of the leader himself.

For instance, I once had command of a destroyer that was due to go into a major modernization in just six months. Almost the entire superstructure of that ship was going to be removed and replaced. Yet for six months I managed to motivate the men of that ship to repair, rehabilitate and maintain that superstructure. On the very day that we arrived in the shipyard for the rehabilitation the crew were still welding and painting on that superstructure, and to my horror I walked down the deck as we tied up, and I found a man who was laying new tile on the deck of the paint locker which, within a

matter of days, would be removed! Does that really make sense? Why did I do it? Of course, to enhance my career and reputation. But, weren't those men better off having some sense of purpose and interest than in being left aimless amidst deterioration and indifference? And today, perhaps, are they better sailors or citizens because they learned that it is preferable to do your best, and to feel proud, rather than to take the line of least resistance?

But where does the line between proper and self-serving leadership rightly fall? If what I had been asking of some of those men was to sacrifice their lives or their integrity to win my ship and myself the honors, would that have been justifiable? In The Red Badge of Courage, that may have been the case.

In our other novel we see a General of World War I days who is clearly unable or unwilling to look on history with that quest for truth and objectivity that has been the core of your course. Each new combat action the General plans is fought with the same fatal assumptions. He goes from failure to failure with greater and greater losses of personnel. Is this man venal? Stupid? Self-serving? Indifferent to human suffering? No. Forrester doesn't portray him that way. He makes him a basically bright, attractive, sincere and well-intentioned person. If the General was wrong in those days, so too, were thousands of others in the military, up and down the line. So too, were hundreds of Civilian Leaders. And how about the Press and the Public and all the others? The advice the General gave

was really what everyone wanted to hear. It was the only kind that he had been conditioned by years of service, to give. But perhaps, because giving it was carrying him towards the top of his profession, he was saving himself for an opportunity for major influence when he rose to the actual top. Isn't that preferable to being cut off as a junior renegade? Or is it the case that when principle and reasoning are bottled up for all those years it takes to rise to the top, that it may be very likely that when the bottle is opened, it goes, "Pouf!" rather than pouring out the elixir of progress and reform?

These are things that we should think about as we go through these books. And you should note that in The General there is also that same issue of men who use "Red Badges of Courage" to urge their subordinates on to sacrifice their lives. And this makes us ask, I believe, can we as intelligent, thinking military leaders, get the required performance from our men by using only reason and logic? Or do we all need "Red Badges of Courage" to propel men into the basically irrational acts of war?

What are a military man's obligations to rationality? To loyalty to his service? To his comrades? To his country? What do we do when our sense of integrity and loyalty conflict? These two novels should stretch our thinking on the moral and ethical questions peculiar to military men. Why do I say that? Peculiar? Because you and I must deal in two realms of morality--the private and the public.

Now I don't suggest that this is unique in the military.
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Every businessman, for instance, has his public responsibilities

and morality. But I would suggest that there's a big difference between saying, "What's good for General Motors is good for the United States," and saying something like, "National security is essential to the preservation of our society."

The former is quoted almost always in derision, even though there's an element of truth in it. The latter has a great deal of truth in it. But, how many times is it quoted in support of questionable causes? That, it seems to me, is the essence of the issue of public morality for military men. That is, how often do you and I take advantage of the greater freedom that appeals to patriotism give us? After all, we work for the State. A fundamental proposition of any State is that it attempts to preserve itself, and hence the well-being of its citizens. As a result, we all commonly condone actions by our State that would contravene our private sense of morality. War itself is one example. Purposeful deceit and spying are others.

Let's be more specific. Let me take the case of General Lavelle. It appears that he deceived his superiors and exceeded his authority; these are both clearly contraventions of our sense of private morality. Why did he do this? Was it for personal gain or glory? It doesn't appear that way to me. And, curiously, I have never seen a newspaper man suggest that. Nor have I ever seen one who even asked the question, Why did this man do what it is averred that he did? The newspapermen immediately assumed that because General Lavelle contravened our

sense of private morality, he was deserving of condemnation. Perhaps in General Lavelle's view, he acted because his sense of public morality justified what he did. Perhaps he felt that the nation's interests were endangered by prolonging the war, and wasting lives, because of the way in which he was pushed to fight.

Can we not in some sense sympathize with a man who at least appeared to be trying to serve his nation's security? And even perhaps, because he accepted the responsibility and risk of disavowal and dishonor in order to achieve what seemed to him to be important to the country? But, too, are not loyalty and obedience the highest military virtues? Do we not, as professionals, abhor precedents that break down the fundamental precept of subordination in our military way of life! And at this particular moment in our country's history, wasn't General Lavelle running counter to what the citizens of this country would support as being in the interests of national security! Did he then, not hurt the image and reputation of our entire military profession, and in so doing, vitally damage our ability to defend the nation's security interests? And ironically, did he not bring down greater control of our military operations in war, the very thing that may have motivated him in the first place to break with authority?

Now I suppose that the key question that you and I should ask ourselves in thinking of the Lavelle case is, Did the General think these implications through, before he took the actions he did? Would you? Would I? Do you and I each carefully consider

the possible conflicts of public and private morality before we act? Are we aware of the choices that we have to make-- choices that are only blurred by stirring slogans like, "What's good for General Motors . . ." or "National Security is essential essential . . ."

Can we lay down rules of conduct for situations like these, or other situations in which you and I may well find ourselves when loyalty, the prospects of promotion, public acclaim, and other factors, impinge on what our private conscience would tell us is right, moral or legal.

Obviously, there is no easy answer. In my personal view there is no rigid formula. What you want to dig out of this Seminar Week, however, is the nature of the conflicts of conscience and purpose that are likely to confront you as military men. Only by understanding that they exist, by seeing how others have handled them before you, and by dissecting the causative elements, can you possibly prepare yourselves to encounter situations such as these.

Be sure too, that you appreciate that I am not talking of issues that are confined only to four-star officers. These conflicts of public and private morality are with each of us from the day we accept our commission. You simply can not live in an atmosphere where the glorious purpose of the organization permits some violations of private morality without it affecting your standards.

Now there are many others who believe that the unique elements of a military profession are bound to promote excesses of all sorts. They accuse us from time to time of being

militaristic, rather than being military men. Alfred Vagts coined the word militarism, and he defined it in the following terms:

"An Army so-built that it serves military men, not war, is militaristic. So is everything in an army which is not preparation for fighting but merely exists for diversion or to satisfy peacetime whims, like the long-anachronistic cavalry. This was well expressed by the Russian Grand Duke, who admitted that he hated war 'because it spoils the armies. . .'"

Of course none of us here would think of becoming militaristic in Vagts' sense of the word. Surely none of us would go overboard for ceremonies or covet decorations, or be rigid in protocol or abuse the privileges of rank. None of us would be so anachronistic as to advocate cavalry or battleships long after their useful life had passed by. Certainly no one here would suggest that carriers or main battle tanks, or Continental Air Defense, or B-1's, or any of the many other projects that various of us have espoused in recent years, will ever appear to have been cavalry cases.

Vagts wrote of militarism in 1937. He updated the book in 1959, but isn't this concept really out of date in the enlightened military environment that you and I live in? Isn't militarism an anachronism in itself? Well, I would suggest that in the very year that Vagts updated the book, the Army of France was exhibiting many of the characteristics of his definition. And I would suggest that today people still comment frequently on the "Military Mind" and the "Military Mentality." They accuse us of things like being innately conservative, failing to see

when our place in the society has changed, being political whether we admit it or not, and suppressing innovations in tactics and even in technology, when it contravenes our accustomed way of doing things.

There are many other ways of course, in which we are type-cast. We--you and I, should look at these roles, I believe, and try to see whether we think they are true, and if so, why? For instance, does our frequent necessity for subordinating individualism to obedience inevitably separates us from the liberal thinkers of the world? Is it because our concern as a profession is with the use of military power and a liberal's concern is more with economics, that we are inevitably separated? Or is that separation necessary and inevitable?

For instance, if we are isolated from our society, is it because of peculiar requirements of our profession or our own indifference? And will the society help or hurt this, as they force us into an all-volunteer situation? For instance, if we do overstress the threat to national security, is it out of selfish purposes, or from a genuine concern that politicians may not understand the proper exercise and limits of military force, and might get us into situations over our head.

Perhaps the typecasting that really bothers me most is the belief that we stubbornly resist change. One theory is that we are a small society unto ourselves; that any society has an instinct for self-preservation; and that preservation to most people means, "Don't change anything. Keep the status quo."

There are some choice stories in Elting Morison's delightful little book that unfortunately seem to bear out this thesis. One of these involved one of my predecessors here as President of the War College, Admiral William S. Sims, and incidentally he happened to be the father-in-law of the author of the book, Professor Morison. At the turn of the century Captain Sims uncovered a way to make absolutely radical and marked improvements in naval gunnery. The Naval Society offered only unremitting resistance. Why? Because the people were either too stupid or too proud to see the improvements? No, not really. Because the people who resisted Sims identified the Navy with a particular type of equipment or a particular set of procedures that were part of their own personal experience. To them, an attack on these particularities was, in effect, an attack on the whole Navy itself.

Can you imagine someone walking in that door this morning and standing up here and telling all of us that all ships are outmoded, that there now are better ways to do the Navy's job? How do you think our society would receive him? With openmindedness and joy?

Well Admiral Sims fortunately did succeed as you know. And as you've read, he appealed to outside authority--to the President himself. This led Admiral Mahan later to state that no Military Service could or should, undertake to reform itself. It simply had to be done from the outside.

Do you believe that? Do you want to admit that we can not shape our own destiny from within the military service?

And if we can not, how in the world do we go about getting the help from the outside? Now, in the business world, you can simply invite somebody in from the outside--even at the top! We've seldom brought in Admirals and Generals from the civilian world in our tight little society. But if Morison and Mahan are right, would you support having 30% of the Flag and General Officers each year picked from the Civilian side of the world? Can you do that in what we call a profession? There are interesting concepts and conflicts here.

And look carefully in your reading this week at the other marvelous example of resistance to change, Morison's story of the USS WAMPANOAG, a ship incidentally which was named for an Indian tribe right from this part of the country. She was ~~commissioned~~ commissioned in 1868. She was steam propelled and could travel, at twenty knots. That was five knots faster or a 33% speed advantage than any other vessel afloat in the world at that time. She could run circles around anybody, and today we're paying millions and millions of dollars for far lesser speed advantages. We didn't build another ship like WAMPANOAG for twenty years; and just one year after we commissioned her, we laid her up and eventually sold her.

Why did we do that? Well, Professor Morison suggests that it was because the Navy had no concept of why we needed such a ship. The Navy had no mission for a ship with her capabilities. The reasons given at the time for eliminating her were in fact, specious. But perhaps the Naval Society was in fact, reacting

with logic. For after all, if they didn't have the foresight to see where the WAMPANOAG fitted in, they were wasting resources to procure her.

Here now we see the transition that's coming between your Strategy Curriculum and your forthcoming Management Course. The Navy rejected WAMPANOAG because it did not have a clearly defined mission for the ship. Not until Mahan did the Navy gain an understanding of its objective, and go on to build ships of that type.

We'll start in your Management Curriculum in January by addressing the necessity for defining the purpose, the objectives of military forces--particularly of course, of Naval forces--before we can decide whether we should be building WAMPANOAGS, carriers, submarines, or what-have-you? For these past eight seminar weeks you've been dealing in the broad, ethereal realms of strategy. We're now beginning the deflation process to the everyday world of decision making. You will make better decisions if you can place them in a Strategic framework. You will also make better decisions if you appreciate the moral conflicts that you may face, the societal pressures of the military environment, and the dubious patterns that many of your predecessors have traced. All of these considerations form the background to your study in Management.

In addition, as you look on this ninth week as the transition week, look at the transition in style! You have two novels, a short delightful book by Professor Morison, and only one

"academic tome" to weight you down. You see, there is light at the end of the tunnel. And surely, Rusty Williams and his Management boys are going to let you get reacquainted with your families.

Seriously, I know you've been working hard, and I appreciate it. The four-week Research Period that follows this Seminar Week, is intended to be a change of pace. I'd like to discuss it very briefly, and why we put it in to the curriculum between the seminars and Management.

If I've heard two complaints from all of you that were consistent, about the seminar periods, one is that you haven't had time to think; and the other is that you're not piecing the whole puzzle together and getting this overall picture of Strategy. Well, I would suggest that the Research Period was designed as an opportunity, first, to probe into one area in depth, to have more leisure and more time to think; to really delve into many, many of the nuances of some one or two or three strategic concepts. But it is an opportunity to take some or several of the concepts that you have been dealing with in these past eight weeks, and work them together; to tie them in, to weave them into the fabric of whatever paper you elect to write.

Now, it's not intended that you simply write on some topic that's of interest to you. I have absolutely no desire that you learn to write college-type term papers, with particular formats, or learn what bibliographies are and all this kind of thing. You're never going to do that again in your military careers.

What you should be doing in this four-week Research Period is writing and working on something with the one objective in mind: Does what I'm doing--is the subject that I'm using--helping to make me a better Strategist? Is it helping to pull together these strains, these various pieces of the puzzle that I've been developing over the past nine weeks?

Some of you may have thought that in discussions with me and at President's Hours, I've been a little peremptory in not welcoming suggested changes and criticisms about the Curriculum. And I certainly admit I have, but it's because I feel it's premature to make adjustments at this time. I will be most interested in your critiques and your criticisms when you have completed the entire Strategy Curriculum. But, I will frankly be much more interested in the criticisms and suggestions of those who have taken advantage of this four-week Research Period to tie together the elements of Strategy with which you have been dealing, who have taken advantage of this time to probe and probe into things that you have only had an opportunity to crack the door on in your actual Seminar Weeks. It's your chance, this four-week period, to try to tie it all together as best you can in a total of thirteen weeks.

And I am confident, because of the splendid job that you've done thus far, that we are going to find some very exciting pieces of research when you turn them in on 15 December.

Thank you. #